

## Chapter Five: Assertiveness

From Webster's dictionary: "Assert" 1. To state or express positively; 2. To defend or maintain (e.g. one's rights)

Assertiveness includes the ability to make positive, direct, and honest statements and stand up for yourself. Knowing how to be assertive is an extremely valuable skill. Being assertive does not mean that you will always get what you want, but at least you will have the satisfaction of knowing you took some action toward meeting your needs and wants. Learning how to be direct, open, and honest about what you think and feel may help you avoid feelings of resentment, frustration, and helplessness.\*

For a variety of reasons, many people with depression have difficulty being assertive. There are many other reasons people find it difficult to express their needs or opinions. (Sometimes we don't know what we want.) They worry about offending or hurting others or being disliked. Sometimes they think it is easier to let others have their way rather than express themselves. However, by not letting others know what they think or need, they often feel frustrated. It is easy to feel hopeless and helpless when your interests are not known or considered. Contrary to their fears, most people respect a person who lets his or her needs be known. In addition, people often gain strength and confidence by asserting themselves.

We encourage you to figure out what you want and need and to express yourself positively! An important aspect of being assertive is saying what you want and need during times in which another person can best respond to you. If someone does not like you for being honest and saying what you want, it is a poor reflection on that person, not on you. One incredible aspect of being assertive is that you also greatly increase the likelihood of having what you want actually happen! On the next page is an exercise to help you prepare and practice being assertive in various situations.

\* Assertiveness differs from aggressiveness in that you respect the rights of others while also trying to have your own needs met.

## Become More Assertive

Think about a situation in which you want to be more assertive. While you think about it consider the following points.

1. Think about what you want from the situation at hand. If it is more than one thing, focus on ONE aspect that seems the most important.
2. Write down what you want (or do not want) using an “I statement.” For example: “I want an appointment next week.” “I want to return this damaged merchandise.” “I do not want to contribute to your organization.”
3. Check your statement to see if it is a) short, b) clear, and c) simple.
4. Revise your statement, if necessary.
5. Practice your statement out loud. Repeat it several times. Practice alone and/or with a friend. Some people find it helpful to practice while they look in the mirror.
6. Anticipate the possible reactions to your statement. Write down what you think the person might say and then think about different ways you can respond.
7. Write down your responses. Repeat steps #3, #4, and #5.
8. When you are ready, have a discussion using the tools you practiced. Start the discussion using your “I statement.”
9. Listen carefully, without interrupting, to the response to your assertive statement. If appropriate, use the responses you practiced.
10. After the discussion is over, think it through. What worked well for you? What didn't?
11. Celebrate the accomplishment of saying what you want!

? You will find a form based on these instructions on page 45. Remember that being assertive is a skill; it may seem difficult at first, but it will improve as you practice. An example on page 44 demonstrates how Mr. Jones worked on being more assertive using these techniques.

Extra forms are provided at the back of Part 2.

## Summary

1. Assertiveness is telling others what you want in a way they understand.
2. Assertiveness helps communicate what you want.
3. People who are assertive are more likely to get what they need and want.
4. It is important to celebrate being assertive no matter what the outcome of the conversation.

## Assertiveness Guide

1. Think about what you want from the other person. List your wishes. Decide the most important think you want and mark it with a check (a).

I wish for more privacy when Tom is visiting.

✓ I wish Tom wouldn't make so many phone calls.

2. Write down what you want in a simple statement. "I want Tom to stop making so many phone calls when he's visiting me on the weekends.

3. Revise your statement to make it a) short, b) clear, and c) simple.

"I want Tom to stop making so many phone calls."

4. Practice saying your statement. Repeat it. Practice alone or with a friend. Anticipate possible reactions to your statement. Write down what the person might say and then think of some responses. Practice your responses out loud.

He or she might say:

a.

I need to keep in touch with work.

b.

I'll pay for the calls.

c.

It's important.

Your response:

a.

It's the weekend. Wait until Monday.

b.

It's not the money. I just wish you'd stay off the phone.

c.

I need quiet time.  
That's important too.

5. When you are ready, have the discussion. Stick to your assertive statement. Repeat it if necessary.
6. Listen carefully, without interrupting, to what the other person says to your assertive statement. Use your responses if appropriate.
7. Evaluate the outcome and celebrate your success. Even if you don't get EXACTLY what you want, give yourself credit for expressing it. Also, working toward compromise is an important aspect of getting what you want.

I used my assertive statement.

☒ Yes

No

I listened to the other person's reaction.

☒ Yes

No

Things I want to think about in future discussions: Next time I'll be more clear when stating how I feel about the situation.

## Assertiveness Guide

1. Think about what you want from the other person. List your wishes. Decide the most important think you want and mark it with a check (a).
2. Write down what you want in a simple statement. "I \_\_\_\_\_"  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. Revise your statement to make it a) short, b) clear, and c) simple.  
"I \_\_\_\_\_."
4. Practice saying your statement. Repeat it. Practice alone or with a friend. Anticipate possible reactions to your statement. Write down what the person might say and then think of some responses. Practice your responses out loud.

He or she might say:	Your response:
a.	a.
b.	b.
c.	c.

5. When you are ready, have the discussion. Stick to your assertive statement. Repeat it if necessary.
6. Listen carefully, without interrupting, to what the other person says to your assertive statement. Use your responses if appropriate.
7. Evaluate the outcome and celebrate your success. Even if you don't get EXACTLY what you want, give yourself credit for expressing it. Also, working toward compromise is an important aspect of getting what you want.

I used my assertive statement.	Yes	No
I listened to the other person's reaction.	Yes	No

Things I want to think about in future discussions: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_